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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 DJIBOUTI 000195

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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTI: GEN WARD MEETING WITH DJIBOUTIAN CHOD MG FATHI

REF: 10 DJIBOUTI 03; 09 DJIBOUTI 1403; TD-314/010840-10

CLASSIFIED BY: James Swan, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(A), (B), (C), (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a friendly hour-long meeting with AFRICOM Commander General William Ward on February 10, Djiboutian Chief of Defense Staff Major General Fathi Ahmed Houssein reviewed threats from Yemen, Somalia, and Eritrea and appealed for additional U.S. assistance to preserve Djibouti as a point of stability in a turbulent region. While appreciative of USG security cooperation to date, Fathi urged further support for maritime patrol capability, border security (including border posts and radar/sensors), and basic materiel (some of which Fathi believed could be satisfied by U.S. Excess Defense Articles). Highlighting current threats, Fathi said Djiboutian security forces were that day responding to a report that four Al-Qaeda operatives had crossed from Yemen to Obock, in Northern Djibouti, and he noted other recent cases in which Djiboutian security successfully tracked potential terrorist-affiliated individuals or other dangerous elements. GEN Ward reassured Fathi that the USG is grateful for Djibouti's close security partnership; understands the risks from Yemen, Somalia, and Eritrea; is pleased to have an active current security cooperation program; and is looking for additional ways to assist Djibouti enhance its security. End summary.

12. (SBU) Visiting AFRICOM Commander General William Ward called February 10 on Djiboutian Chief of Defense Staff MG Fathi Ahmed Houssein. Also present on the Djiboutian side were BG Osman Nour Soubagleh (East Africa Standby Force Commander), MAJ Fouad Elmi Waiss (FAD Liaison to CJTF-HOA), and LT Ibrahim Zakaria (Director of International Relations). U.S. participants included Ambassador James Swan, CJTF-HOA Commander RDML Anthony Kurta, AFRICOM POLAD Raymond Brown, Embassy Djibouti Defense Attache LTC E.J. Dupont, and other AFRICOM staff.

Fathi Highlights Threats to Djibouti

13. (S/NF) Fathi said that recent increased pressure on Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) would leave extremists in Yemen few options other than to flee to Djibouti or Somalia. He said he had just received reports from sources in Yemen that four Al Qaeda operatives had crossed to Obock, in northern Djibouti (Ref C). Djiboutian security (NFI) were responding that very day by checking mosques, Koranic schools, and other locations in an effort to track these individuals. Fathi reviewed other recent cases in which Djiboutian security had acted in response to potential threats: a week earlier, he said, a Koranic school teacher with

ties to al-Shabaab was caught and expelled from the country. Later in the conversation, he described the arrest of six "troublemakers" ("malfaiteurs" - a term often used to describe armed bands of ethnic Afar youth that operate in some areas of the country) who were then turned over to the Government of Ethiopia.

14. (C) Turning only briefly to Eritrea, Fathi repeated GODJ assertions that 200 or more infiltrators had crossed into Djibouti from the north, with the support of Eritrean President Isaias. Fathi claimed that these infiltrators did not threaten Djibouti militarily, but could cause small disruptions. Later in the conversation, he stated that Eritrea's occupation of territory in northern Djibouti had required the FAD to increase its force strength by 2,000-3,000 troops. While the GODJ bore the extra cost of salaries, food, lodging, logistics, etc. for these forces, it counted on its international partners to support its equipment needs.

Djiboutian Security Assistance Needs

15. (C) Fathi went on to outline Djiboutian requests for
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assistance to enhance security. These included:

--Excess Defense Articles to help meet requirements for basic military supplies;

--two 30-40 meter patrol boats to extend the reach of Djibouti's navy;

--mobile radars or other sensor systems to improve security for Djibouti's porous borders;

--rehabilitation of Djibouti's border posts, especially along the borders with Somalia and Eritrea.

16. (C) Probed by GEN Ward to elaborate on border security requirements, Fathi explained that a detailed survey had been completed by CENTCOM in 2002 of what was needed to rehabilitate Djiboutian border posts. There are 23 border posts in Djibouti, he said, typically 30-40 kms apart. In many areas, the terrain is mountainous or desert, making physical monitoring of these gaps difficult. Even on Djibouti's border with Somalia/Somaliland (which is only 12 km from Camp Lemonnier), the GODJ has difficulty monitoring individuals who cross at locations other than the now-collapsed formal border crossing, including smugglers, illegal immigrants, and possible terrorists. (Ambassador noted that FY 2009 S/CT funding of \$500,000 will support rehabilitation of the Loyada Border Post and provide other limited border security assistance at that location. Both GEN Ward and RDML Kurta commented that force protection for Camp Lemonnier personnel would be improved, if the nearby border were better secured.)

17. (C) Wrapping up his appeal for assistance, Fathi stressed that Djibouti remains "the only point of stability and peace in the region" but "we need to be careful," because inattention to emerging threats could lead to insecurity. The GODJ seeks only modest assistance to its defense and security sector. If Djibouti were to become "another Somalia" donor partners would be forced to spend multiples of current amounts on additional humanitarian and counter-extremist operations.

¶8. (C) In his comments throughout the meeting, GEN Ward praised the close USG-GODJ partnership that encouraged Fathi to speak openly about Djibouti's security requirements. GEN Ward said the USG shared Djiboutian concerns over threats emanating from Somalia, Yemen, and Eritrea. In recent months, Yemen has become an increasing focus of attention. He reviewed the close USG security cooperation with Djibouti, including not only longer-term Foreign Military Financing programs, but also more recent USG support, such as that provided by the Combatant Commander's Initiative Fund to support the East Africa Standby Force (EASF) Field Training Exercise (FTX) in November 2009; creation of a new U.S. Navy Harbor Security Unit for the Port of Djibouti; and Djibouti's inclusion as a partner in the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program. He acknowledged the remaining significant needs of the Djiboutian military, and agreed to follow up in an effort to respond. He noted that he would soon return to Washington to testify before Congressional oversight committees responsible for future funding decisions.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: The atmosphere was warm and friendly throughout the encounter, as Generals Ward and Fathi discussed as partners how to cooperate to meet common security objectives. Post will follow up through the Defense Attache to develop further details of the defense requirements outlined by MG Fathi in order to present them for decision. Fathi's appeal should be seen in the context of other recent discussions with President Ismail Omar

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Guelleh and National Security Advisor Hassan Said, who have presented similar threat analyses and requests for support - particularly to secure Djibouti against extremist threats from Somalia and Yemen (Refs A and B).

¶10. (U) GEN Ward has cleared this cable.
SWAN